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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND
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Agenda item 3

DRAFT REPORT

Rapporteur: Mrs. Sharon BRENNEN-HAYLOCK (Bahamas)

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: UNITED NATIONS REFORM:
MEASURES AND PROPOSALS (item 2 (b))

PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
1998-1999 (item 2 (a))

Section 1B. General Assembly affairs and conference services

1. At its 33rd meeting, on 15 October 1997, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered section 1B, General Assembly affairs and conference services, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 contained in document A/52/303.

Discussion

2. Most delegations expressed support for the creation of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Several delegations, while expressing support for the creation of the new Department, questioned the proposed transfer of responsibility for subprogramme 1.6, Decolonization, of programme 1, Political Affairs, of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001,[1] to the proposed new Department. Those delegations also objected to the transfer of responsibility for the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples from the Department of Political Affairs to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Other delegations felt that the redistribution of activities related to the Decolonization Unit may have a negative impact on the activities of the Unit.

Those delegations felt that the transfer of the Decolonization Unit from the Department of Political Affairs to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services denied the political essence of the Special Committee and undermined the Organization's decolonization programme. Some other delegations referred to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 which established subprogramme 1.6, Decolonization, with very clear mandates to be implemented by the Department of Political Affairs. Other delegations indicated that the transfer of the activities of a highly political issue, such as decolonization, out of the Department of Political Affairs to the proposed new Department did not appear appropriate, and indicated that to fulfil the mandate in the medium-term plan, decolonization must remain with the Department of Political Affairs. Several delegations indicated that the question of the transfer of the activities of decolonization was a totally political issue and was not related to reform.

3. Many delegations recalled General Assembly resolution 43/47 of 22 November 1988 entitled "International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism" and all other relevant Assembly resolutions and decisions on the matter, and noted the resolution of the Special Committee, entitled "Decolonization programme in the United Nations System", adopted by consensus on 6 June 1997 (A/AC.109/2094). Those delegations also noted the letter dated 18 September 1997 from the Chairman of the Special Committee addressed to the Secretary-General (A/52/379). In that regard, the same delegations reaffirmed the political nature and substance of the mandate of the Special Committee and expressed their concern about the proposed changes submitted by the Secretary-General. Those delegations emphasized, therefore, that the Decolonization Unit should be provided with the full resources, as stipulated in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/6/Sect.2) in accordance with the medium-term plan. The same delegations stressed that all the functions in the Department of Political Affairs related to the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and the Special Political and Decolonization (Fourth) Committee must be maintained in the Department of Political Affairs.

4. Some delegations supported the proposals to combine the technical and conference-servicing units in the Secretariat. One delegation indicated that the activities of the new Department were not just subsidiary functions but were a substantive activity of the Secretariat. The creation of the new Department under a different organizational structure would not, therefore, adversely affect the programme of activities.

5. Other delegations indicated that there should be a rationale for proposing reform and revising structures of organizational units and departments. Those delegations queried why the servicing of the Fifth and Sixth Committees was not proposed for transfer to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services as had been the case for secretariats servicing other organs and committees, and stressed that such a transfer did not reflect equal treatment to all the secretariats of the Main Committees of the General Assembly. Those delegations expressed that all the secretariats of the Main Committees should be included within section 1B.

6. One delegation welcomed the proposal to enhance further the ability of the President of the General Assembly by supplementing the level of support currently provided.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. The Committee took note of the information concerning section 1B, Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, and draws the attention of the General Assembly to the variations between the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and the proposals of the Secretary-General.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6 and corrigendum (A/51/6/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Corr.1).